





## Lisa Margonelli

Jun 16 2009, 8:20PM

### Climate Change Will Make You Sneeze! (Are we scared yet?)

As the debate over Waxman Markey Climate Legislation heats up, something big and scary from experts at 13 government science agencies has appeared: [The Authoritative Assessment of National, Regional Impacts of Global Climate Change](#).

As the name implies, this is an enormous, authoritative report, but it's certainly not the first. What is remarkable about the report is how it reflects a growing trend towards personalizing the impact of climate change. Hence [slide five in this powerpoint showing that pollen levels will double by 2075](#). Message: You (or your kids) will sneeze! Another alarming slide shows that the [climate of Illinois could become more like that of East Texas](#). And the South? Hot.

I'm sure that some will accuse the report of politicizing the science, but I don't think that's the case. Instead, I think climate scientists have decided to abandon the dry statistics (which were driven by political considerations) and talk about what they actually see in the future. One of the problems with climate change science is that much of the discussion has been confined to probabilities and scenarios, and translation of what this actually means has largely occurred among the climate cognoscenti. (I wrote last month about high level discussions of the [potential necessity of eating jellyfish](#). We really aren't getting that on the evening news.) This report brings makes some of these conversations more accessible. But after a decade of confusing reports--and even disasters like Katrina-- will the economy-logged public demand action now?

Side note: I find this [historical graph of how weather has dramatically increased grid outages](#) since 1992 to be almost more shocking than the future trends. The Obama administration is putting together a cyber-warfare agency in part to protect the grid from attack. But who needs terrorists when you've got squirrels and the weather to do the job for you? Add in the Gulf Coast's oil infrastructure's vulnerability to hurricanes (and the Strategic Petroleum Reserve is located there too) and you have... uh... the perfect storm.

Tags: [climate change](#) | [cyber-warfare](#) | [grid](#) | [scientists](#)

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CAM@

June 17, 2009 9:57 PM

I don't think the report 'politicizes' the science, I think it dumbs it down, at the EXPENSE of making the information accessible. All these statistics and elaborations are impossible for the average citizen to digest and weigh in the first place. The so-called linkage with real effects you cite as innovative in this study is as abstract as the statistic themselves. It is so overpowering that people either:

1. Tune it out from the beginning.
2. Believe the whole thing is impossible to understand.
3. Believe mankind is doomed no matter what.

Environmentalism needs to clean up its act and find new ways to popularize its messages. They make huge mistakes when they:

1. exaggerate
2. use a shot-gun way of explaining the woes of climate change instead of zeroing in on the three key climate-altering dynamics that are the most dangerous or easiest to control. That is, narrow your target.
3. make environmentalism a personal moral issue, which may draw the scrupulous in but will alienate legions of others.

Fear-mongering and non-stop doomsday forecasts have dominated the 'environmental movement' since the publication of "The Silent Spring" over 30 years ago. Sentiment as a message doesn't work.

Try something else.


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johnsterling

June 18, 2009 12:26 PM

Here's a link arguing why the chart on weather related grid outages may be unpersuasive and may

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LISA MARGONELLI

*Lisa Margonelli directs the New America Foundation's Energy Productivity Initiative, which works to promote energy efficiency as a way of ensuring energy security, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and economic security for American families. She spent roughly four years and traveled 100,000 miles to report her book about the oil supply chain, Oil On the Brain: Petroleum's Long Strange Trip to Your Tank, which was published by Nan Talese/Doubleday in 2007. The American Library Association named the book one of the 25 Notable Books of 2007. During the energy crisis of the 1970's, she was growing up in central Maine, where her family heated their house with wood, which they hauled with a horse. Later, fortunately, they got a tractor. The experience instilled a strong appreciation for the convenience of fossil fuels.* [READ MORE](#)

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